**Research Review: How do we teach intonation in oral reading
in an EFL context?**

Benjamin M. Jansson

Graduate School of Education (TESOL), University of Southern Maine, Portland

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Research Review: How do we teach prosody in an EFL context?

Introduction

One of the benefits of a problem is that many interesting solutions can be generated from it. Probably no pedagogic problem equates to one solution for all because teaching and learning are filled with individuals and so there must be various solutions. A review of six research articles all documenting different approaches to teaching intonation in oral reading reveals the challenges in teaching intonation (and more broadly prosody in oral reading). These challenges have been the motivating factors for experimenting and acting. Mitrofanova (2012), in her study: "Raising EFL Awareness of English intonation functioning," discusses the difficulty of teaching prosody isolated from contextual meaning, and at the same time cites intonation's overall importance in L2 teaching, Couper-Kuhlen, (2001) as cited by Mitrofanova, (2012). It (intonation) is a subconscious pattern that we need to make conscious for our students, Mitrofanova (2012). Her study was inspired by personal experience. EFL students in her university English classes could listen and imitate prosodic elements like intonation, but in natural conversation they could not reproduce it. Mitrofanova wanted to teach students the necessary functional background of intonation with a top-down approach utilizing more context. An interesting and thought-provoking M.A. thesis by Park, W, M., at Portland State University (2011) shows us the other end of a continuum of intonation teaching strategies from that of Mitrofanova's (2012) discourse analysis-based one. Park's research question focused on whether a group of four common "intonation contours," (p. 9) could be taught explicitly and improve student's pronunciation. Mitrofanova's (2012) research chose a discourse analysis framework (teaching the functionality behind intonation) to improve her student's deeper understanding of intonation. In "Differential effects of instruction on the development of second language

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comprehensibility, word stress, rhythm, and intonation: The case of inexperienced Japanese EFL learners," Saito K. & Saito, Y., (2017), a form-focused mini-lesson on intonation, word-stress, and rhythm is embedded in a presentation skills unit. From an ESL classroom in Toronto, Canada, Morgan, B., (1997) in "Intonation and Identity, (TESOL Quarterly, 1997) relates his action research and intonation lesson which puts students' identity, and sociocultural experience at the forefront alongside student-generated intonation needs and forms. In this study, students and teacher negotiate the meaning and social aspects of intonation together. Additionally, the teacher becomes a facilitator of student-generated discussion with intonation being relevantly contextualized. Somewhere in the middle of the intonation pedagogy continuum where elements of explicit instruction and discourse analysis exist together is a Readers Theater experiment: "Improving the English Reading Prosody of L2 Learners Through Readers Theater," Chusanachoti & Thienkalaya, (2020). This study makes intonation more contextualized through dramatic dialogue and utilizes peer learning and group dynamics to foster acquisition. There is explicit teaching of target intonation forms and also individual choice based on the communicative value of the dramatic moment, Chusanachoti & Thienkalaya, (2020). Another creative research approach/action research lesson utilizing a transfer of skills similar to readers theater is a study using music notation as an example for creating written prosodic notation: "Integrating Music and Literacy: Applying Invented Music Notation to Support Prosody and Reading Fluency," Bolden, & Beach, (2021). This study utilized short poems along with original student generated prosodic markings to affect the final poem performance and reading. Park, (2011) uses short sentences and dialogues from well-known short stories, and the Readers Theater study utilizes dramatic text and dramatic dialogues as context and finally Saito, K., & Saito, Y., (2012) use a focus on form process within a presentation skills class. These studies

represent the semi-contextual school of intonation teaching because they contain explicit

intonation teaching with some context, however, without discussing the deeper functional

operation of intonation. In Mitrofanova, (2012), and in Morgan (1997), a more social-functional

intonation is taught. Both sides of the continuum are important. I would like to begin with a

literature review to see more clearly where these particular studies lay on the continuum.

Review of the Literature

First, a review of the research using four semi-contextual approaches to teaching

intonation (explicit with no deep functionality) and then two content-oriented, intonation

function approaches utilizing discourse analysis. All the studies here utilize some

contextual framework around teaching intonation, but it is a question of how much that

separates their research question and design.

On the Continuum: Explicit Instruction of Intonation.

In "Teaching Intonation Patterns Through Reading Aloud," Park (2011), sought to

analyze the results of a five week long teaching intervention consisting of tutoring students

individually about "intonational contours," Celce-Murcia, et al., (1996), p. 201-208, as cited

by Park (2011). The intonational contours are "definite statements", wh- questions, yes/ no

questions, and tag questions, Park (2011). The aim of this study was not to focus on the

deeper functional and social aspects of intonation because he wanted to tap into whether a

specific period of teaching the intonational contours would benefit students. Moving slightly

away on the continuum towards more context we have "Differential effects of instruction on

the development of second language comprehensibility, word stress, rhythm, and intonation:

The case of inexperienced Japanese EFL learners" (Saito Y. & Saito. K 2017). This study

utilizes a focus on form method with an experimental design. This study shows a good

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combination approach to teaching intonation, rhythm and word-stress. Here, the form

focused instruction lies within a meaning-oriented lesson about presentation skills (p. 596). It

is unknown how much, if any, deeper functional aspects were included in the mini-lessons

about prosody in this study. Another example of intonation instruction and a successful one

for young students utilizes a focus on form method in a more creative way utilizing students'

background schema (in this case students' basic awareness of music notation). "Integrating

Music and Literacy: Applying Invented Music Notation to Support Prosody and Reading

Fluency," Bolden, & Beach, (2021), is a study utilizing a cross-transfer of skills (music

knowledge to prosodic reading). This action research has elements of a qualitative study

(teacher observation, note-taking, but is focused on a practical lesson to teach young students

about prosody. An assessment checklist based on Ontario government Learning Standards

was used rather than an analysis of the data collected (student invented notation), Bolden, &

Beach, (2021). The process of the lesson is well documented, and students' results are

included in the article and represent qualitative data (students created and drew their own

unique prosodic markings over a poem and then performed it). This study is in the middle of

the continuum closer to the explicit side. Like Park's (2011) study, the music notation study

utilizes short excerpts of text (poems in this case and short selections from well-known

novels in Park's study). The literature excerpts provide a nominal amount of context. Besides

music, dramatic theater reading offers a chance for ELL's to practice dialogue with a certain

amount of context and prosodic elements present. In a mixed method study by Chusanachoti

& Thienkalaya, (2020) titled "Improving the English Reading Prosody of L2 Learners

Through Readers Theater," a RTI (Readers Theater Intervention) was taught for four weeks.

The RTI included four steps: prepare, preview, practice, perform, Chusanachoti &

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Thienkalaya, (2020). According to the authors, it was repeated reading, automaticity and peer interaction that helped facilitate prosodic improvement in oral reading, Chusanachoti & Thienkalaya, (2020). This study represents an interesting place in the pedagogy of intonation continuum because in dramatically interpreting text we must understand the social function behind it and yet this study also included repetition practice, modeling, chorale practice and explicit teaching of new intonation forms in class, so this study belongs in the middle of the continuum.

On the other end of the Intonation Pedagogy Continuum

Moving away from a primary focus on a specific number of intonation forms and explicit instruction is a more discourse analysis-oriented approach. In "Identity and Intonation: Linking Dynamic Processes in an ESL Classroom," Morgan, (1997) shows a remarkable way to connect learning intonation with individual student biographies. Morgan describes, observes, and notates the process and student reactions to his intonation lesson. His research emphasizes the importance of his students' identity. Morgan notes that putting our student's identity at the forefront is important because intonation can sometimes be about power, and the ability to say yes, no, or to defend yourself or respond in various ways (Morgan 1997). His study is qualitative and closer to action research, there is no description of data collected, but rather an overview of his experience in teaching intonation and linking it with his students identity. Continuing on the discourse analysis end of the continuum Mitrofanova, (2012) specifically uses an experimental and quantitative design utilizing two groups, an experimental group that is instructed in intonation via discourse analysis and a control group that is taught in a traditional way emphasizing imitation and production, Mitrofanova, (2012). Both groups received 20 academic

hours of this teaching methodology. Mitrofanova found an improvement in the control group in post-test analysis, Mitrofanova (2012).

In conclusion, these articles demonstrate a small division within the pedagogical perspective of how to teach intonation in English. Should we steer to the more explicit context-limited scenario so we can clearly present, isolate and practice specific contours as Park (2011), demonstrates? Or should we dive into the social identity of our learners and learn the deep constructs of intonation which lie in our crafting of language for social interactions? To see more clearly, we should look at the research purpose of studies examining intonation and prosody.

Research Purposes

Within the continuum, let's begin with explicit (bottom-up) and move toward more discourse analysis (top-down) approaches. Let's look at the research questions, methodology and how they line up comparatively. Park (2011) has a clear purpose, and it is to see what the effect of "explicit pronunciation practice in the form of oral reading practice has on intonational accuracy" (p. 9). Pre and post-tests were used for quantitative data and a recorded questionnaire and interviews were all used for qualitative data collection. One positive point of Park's research is he brings awareness to four common intonational contours. However, there is a disconnect between Park's research questions, and his research methodology. He asks whether explicit intonation instruction (targeting intonation contours) can help his sample group achieve accuracy with native speaker norms being the model (Park 2011). Teaching explicit information and then expecting close to native speaker norms is unrealistic and counter - productive. It is more likely students could achieve similarity to NS norms through repeated reading or automaticity type activities, and not through learning explicit rules. Saito K., & Saito Y., (2017) in "Differential effects of instruction on the development of second language comprehensibility, word stress,

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rhythm, and intonation: The case of inexperienced Japanese EFL learners," utilize a focus on

form methodology in their experimental group and use a control group that does not receive

Focus on Form instruction. This study has a broader topic and focus. They ask: which aspects of

prosody are "susceptible to instructional gains?" There are two research questions here: is

suprasegmental instruction with a FonF method productive? Which aspects can be acquired most

easily? Through quantitative analysis, pre- and post-test design, this study teased out the gains

made in three variables: intonation, word-stress and rhythm. In fact, intonation made the least

gain, Saito K., & Saito Y., (2017). In between explicit instruction and a discourse analysis

approach to teaching intonation there is a middle point. Automaticity through repeated reading

allows students to focus their energy on higher-order thinking, Chusanachoti & Thienkalaya,

(2020). This is one theory as to why using a Readers Theater Intervention (RTI) improved

students' prosody (within the three variables: phrasing, intonation, volume), Chusanachoti &

Thienkalaya, (2020). The study: "Improving the English Reading Prosody of L2 Learners

Through Readers Theater," Chusanachoti & Thienkalaya, (2020), asked two questions: Can

Readers Theater improve students reading prosody? Secondly, how does it improve prosody?

This was a mixed-methods study that lined its methodology up well with its research questions.

Can it (RTI) improve students' reading prosody was translated into methodology of dramatic

reading practice in small groups, repeated reading and peer teaching, and performance situations.

How does it improve students' prosody was answered with a learning log completed twice

during a two-unit teaching intervention. Another creative approach to teaching intonation is

"Integrating Music and Literacy: Applying Invented Music Notation to Support Prosody and

Reading Fluency," Bolden, & Beach, (2021). The research question here is more an aspect of the

government of Ontario's Learning Standards, Bolden, & Beach, (2021). As part of the

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curriculum to improve third graders' prosodic oral reading (to improve reading comprehension) a lesson is described here that links students' musical schema (basic knowledge of music notation) as inspiration for creating unique prosodic notation to mark a poem with. Both this study and the readers theater study offer instances where practice, repeated reading, and performance are used. This reveals the importance of automaticity in intonation and prosodic teaching and learning. At the other end of the intonation and prosody teaching continuum lies methodology that is more firmly on the side of discourse analysis. In Brian Morgan's 1997 article "Identity and Intonation: Linking Dynamic Processes in an ESL Classroom" he outlines a challenge essentially. Identity is sometimes about power, especially for ESL immigrants who need to be able to express positives and negatives, imperatives, and questions, and indeed all manner of important language to gain power in society. Morgan's research purpose is to include the identity of his students in his work and to bring power to his students. Outlining a lesson plan that he used with success, he describes the process of encouraging his student's input by eliciting responses and asking questions directed at their sociocultural experience and especially their new life negotiating a new culture in Canada. Morgan's background focus is: how do we combine learning English prosody within the framework of social interaction? Using his students input and discussion Morgan changes his role from teacher to facilitator so his students can speak and give their perspective. He draws out ideas and experience. His methodology described in his action research is lined up with his theory. His theoretical background is largely based on a "sociocultural theory of language" by Halliday, (1984) as cited by Brian Morgan, (1997). Going directly to his students and tapping sociocultural experience and using this to elicit discussion and direction involves the students in the creation of their own prosodic needs. At a point on the spectrum, close to Morgan (1997) is: "Raising EFL Awareness of English intonation functioning,

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Mitrofanova, (2012). Her research question is: "Can focusing on intonation functioning at the level of the utterance improve L2 intonation forms and enhance reading intelligibility?" (p. 280). Mitrofanova uses an experimental design, a control and experimental group. The control group has a traditional lesson over several weeks where intonation is learned through imitation and repetition, the experimental group however starts with discourse analysis and learning the functional aspects of the intonation and then moves on to working on how intonation interacts with syntax, Mitrofanova, (2012).

It is clear that explicit instruction and focus on form are important pedagogical choices for a teaching intonation. It is equally true that our identity is important and an extremely valuable resource for tapping into the functional-communicative value of intonation. Additionally, we can use transfer of skills from our own experience, for example utilizing music or drama. We need all means to teach and learn intonation and prosody.

Data Collection

The research design and data collection strategies are reflections of the research questions and are situated next to each other on the continuum. In Park (2011) uses a non-random sample of convenience at the University of Portland. He contacts teachers within an English language pre-university program and obtains volunteers and participant recommendations. He also makes three presentations about his research study in these English pre-university classes. In this study, there is a high level of validity in the instruments used to collect data. A pre- and post-test were based on targeting the four common intonational contours which Park wanted to measure. The text excerpt used in the oral reading pre-test was recommended for eliciting these intonational contours by Celce-Murcia, et al., (1996) as cited by Park (2011). The post-test was created by the researcher and contained the four intonational contours that were targeted for measurement, Park

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(2011). A questionnaire and exit interviews were all recorded, and not conducted by the researcher which lessens possible bias in these qualitative aspects. At a different place on the continuum and using a convenience sample of an intact third-grade class, "Integrating Music and Literacy: Applying Invented Music Notation to Support Prosody and Reading Fluency," Bolden, & Beach (2021), follows a qualitative approach. The data is collected in the form of teacher observation and student drawings of the invented prosodic notation. Although basic music education is compulsory in elementary school it is still possible a student may not be aware of music notation (however, it is unlikely). On the continuum and based on another creative approach to teaching intonation is "Improving the English Reading Prosody of L2 Learners Through Readers Theater," Chusanachoti & Thienkalaya (2020), which uses a mixed-method research design and a cluster sampling technique. A total of 60 second-year students all of whom were registered in an English class were gathered. Their pre- and post- test were validated by three linguistics experts, Chusanachoti & Thienkalaya (2020). There is also a qualitative learning log, and verbatim comments are included in the research article. The learning log adds substantial objectivity, and the student perspective really makes this study strong. Using qualitative data is a strengthening and leveling force since it brings the students' experience to the forefront. Morgan's (1997) identity and intonation research includes details of his students' comments and perspectives shared from his own notes and classroom observations. Morgan uses a sample of convenience, and his research is more related to action research. Discourse analysis, is combined with some focus on form intonation study and practice, Morgan (1997). Morgan states he is not using traditional data collection techniques for qualitative data because it is "intrusive" (p. 22). It is understandable and he relays several past experiences as justification. However, this does mean there could be bias, and we don't have a completely objective view of

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his research. In the same area on the continuum is Mitrofanova's (2012) intonation study

utilizing discourse analysis to tease out whether teaching the functionality behind intonation will

benefit her students, Mitrofanova (2012). Mitrofanova uses a quantitative design, a pre-test and

post-test, however, the post- test was a selection which allowed the students to work and practice

on it prior to testing, Mitrofanova (2012). This measurement may not elicit the real deep

functional understanding Mitronova is seeking. It seems this post-test is more related to the

readers theater study which allowed students to repeatedly read and master the text before a final

performance. The sample group Mitrofanova uses is unexplained as well. Probably to control for

variables or because of convenience (it is not explained) the sample group consisted of 24 female

students studying English at a Russian university. Is it an all-female university? Was this sample

gender-specific for an experimental control reason? Saito Y. & Saito. K, (2017) in "Differential

effects of instruction on the development of second language comprehensibility, word stress,

rhythm, and intonation: The case of inexperienced Japanese EFL learners," also use a

convenience sample group: 20 EFL students from two classes, from a Japanese university. The

authors state the oral reading pre- and post-tests are valid and there is also reference to the

"*Lexical Tutor*, Cobb, (2011) as cited by Saito Y. & Saito. K, (2017) for the words used in the

tests were high-frequency words. Additionally, wh- questions, yes / no questions, and

multisyllabic words were contained, Saito Y. & Saito. K, (2017). Post-test raters had relevant

backgrounds and education and good rater consistency was established, Saito Y. & Saito. K,

(2017). A reference to a previous article by the authors on establishing rater reliability was

presented in the article as well. There is a thorough literature review.

  The studies reviewed here contained several qualitative measures such as the learning log

in Chusanachoti & Thienkalaya (2020), direct teacher observation and notes as in Morgan

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(1997), Park's (2011) exit interviews, and in Bolden & Beach (2021), student drawings of original written prosodic notation are included. Saito Y. & Saito. K, (2017) included detailed information about raters and reliability to enhance the quantitative data analyzed. We have to review the data analysis to reach the clearest picture of the two schools of thought in teaching intonation.

Data Analysis and Results.

Beginning with a more explicit methodology, Park (2011) used a quantitative design, he used tables to show results from pre-and post-tests (each participant's number of correctly spoken variables on the post-test was marked). Participants' correct use of the four common intonational contours was marked in table 8, (p. 59) and rendered into percentages in "table 9" (p. 60). The results (including interview data) confirm the research question (does explicit intonational contour instruction help?). Saito Y. & Saito. K, (2017) have their data analysis represented in "table 3" (p. 600). The results support the research question: focus on form does help in learning word-stress, intonation, and rhythm, Saito Y. & Saito. K, (2017). The study's variables of rhythm, word stress, and intonation (p. 599) are analyzed and represented in "table 3" and "table 4" (pp. 600-601). There is also an analysis of the "absence" or "misplacement" of the variables, and among all the variables "vowel reduction" (p. 600) improved the most in the experimental group. It is also noted that word-stress and rhythm were acquired more than intonation in the experimental group and one possible reason for this is positive cross-linguistic transfer, Saito Y. & Saito. K, (2017). The results of this study back up the research questions and offer information about what could be obtained with the least effort (through emphasizing cross-linguistic positive transfer) in teaching and what needs more involvement and perhaps explicit instruction (intonation). A study and lesson plan linking music notation with creative prosodic

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notation reveals data in the form of student drawings of sentences with unique prosodic markers

for the variables: volume, pitch (intonation), and duration. This is a simple lesson, and yet allows

students' identity through choice and agency to be represented. "Table 1, Learning Standards and

Assessment Checklist" (p. 11) is a guide for teachers for summative evaluation of skills (in both

music and reading literacy). Creative approaches such as linking music and dramatic theater

reading may be good ways to teach prosodic elements in English. In Chusanachoti &

Thienkalaya's, 2020 study the RTI showed student gains in phrasing, intonation, and volume

(see table 1 and 2, p. 312). The qualitative learning logs are significant sources of data and

contain verbatim comments about how students progressed and mastered the material (pp. 313-

314). Overall, the data gathered and analyzed connects with the research questions: Can readers

theater help students improve prosody, (including intonation)? And, how does it help? Post-test

results shown in "table 2" (p. 312) show an improvement in students' oral reading prosody in the

three measured variables of phrasing, tone, and volume. The learning logs contain student

observation and show that peer teaching, group dynamics, peer pressure and repeated reading all

helped students in the final post-test and in the two reading performances, Chusanachoti &

Thienkalaya (2020). Moving to the more discourse analysis side of the continuum, Morgan

(1997) shows through student comments, teacher notes and descriptions that his research/lesson

proved his research hypotheses: putting his students' identity and social existence in the

foreground will help generate the needed intonation forms, as well as the pedagogical means. In

full recognition of using discourse analysis, Mitrofanova (2012) in "Raising Students awareness

of English Intonation Functioning" shows that students improved in "overall impression",

"Information content structuring," and "Fine intonation form" represented in "Table 3," (p. 288).

The post- test was rated by "two experienced English teachers". The reliability is questionable

since there is no mention of inter-rater reliability and it is only mentioned that a "series of questions encouraging them to analysis particular aspects," (p. 288) (of students' speech) was given. Like the readers theater intervention, having a text and practicing it before the post-test does not give data on whether the deeper construct of prosodic skill has been learned (at the functional level).

Conclusion

The answer to the question of how we can teach intonation to EFL students is still no doubt debatable, but from this review, a continuum of approaches is higlighted. A few questions for intonation pedagogy consideration are: Do you begin with explicit instruction and limited context? Or do you take time like Morgan (1997) and include student's identity and social existence into the creation of personally meaningful, student-generated prosodic tasks? Also, do we need an experimental design to highlight which teaching method is the best? Also, what level of intonation function are we measuring? Text selections that students have perfected may not show us real functional understanding of intonation in a post-test. With these questions in mind and from reviewing these six articles I have come up with a few ideas of how to teach intonation and perhaps more broadly (word stress, and rhythm) to ELLs.

To do:

- Be creative in teaching intonation: use Readers Theater (scripts at the appropriate level and length), use a transfer of skills (like music, which also contains prosodic elements), or capitalize on linguistic transfer (I have learned from firsthand experience that English and Japanese both have word-stress).

- Be inclusive when teaching intonation: encourage students' identity through their sociohistorical experience and let them inspire lesson content including dialogue

creation, altering and discussing textbook dialogues, and controlled practice or (uncontrolled) interactions, give students time to think about their experience. Perhaps writing could be a scaffold for this?

- Be explicit when teaching intonation: use focus on form mini lessons. Don't teach every form at the same time, but as Park (2011) did, just focus on four intonation contours.

- Understand assessment for intonation: to know intonation means to be able to produce it within a new context. It is not just about repeated reading and mastering it in one place.

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